

AFTER BRUSILOV CAME THE END

By KLAUS MEHNERT

A few weeks ago a Soviet paper in Shanghai compared the offensives of the Tsarist General Brussilov with those of the Red Army during this winter. Indeed, there are similarities. Taking up the suggestion, we have studied Brussilov's offensives in the light of our present knowledge, tracing their aftereffects down to that day, exactly twenty-five years ago, when, on March 3, 1918, the collapse of the gigantic military machine of Russia was sealed at the conference table of Brest-Litovsk.

A GREAT TEAM

THE two great offensives connected with the name of General Brussilov (pronounced with the accent on the "i") took place in the summers of 1916 and 1917. But in order to grasp their significance we must turn briefly to the first two years of the Great War.

On the eastern front the war had started with a Russian offensive. When in August 1914 the German armies swept through Belgium and northern France, urgent calls for aid were sent to Russia by her western allies. In response to these, two Russian armies, indicated by black arrows on our map, invaded East Prussia on August 17 and August 20 respectively. This province had been almost denuded of troops in order to get every man possible for the drive toward Paris. Only the German Eighth Army was there. When its commander in chief and his chief of staff lost their nerve, Generals von Hindenburg and von Ludendorff were appointed in their place by the Kaiser on August 22. Together with Lieut. Colonel (later General) Max Hoffmann, who had been with the staff of the Eighth Army before, they formed the best team of the entire Great War. One of the Russian armies was annihilated at Tannenberg, while the other was

driven out of East Prussia after suffering a catastrophe. The entire affair was over by September 17, Russia having lost almost two entire armies, about a quarter of a million men, and huge amounts of war material.

The Russians had better luck with their offensive in the south. Their armies, including one under General Brusilov, succeeded in Galicia in throwing back the Austro-Hungarian forces against the mountain wall of the Carpathians. To aid the Austrians, part of the victorious Eighth Army of East Prussia was formed into a new army, the Ninth, under General von Mackensen which, with the speed of a flyweight and the punch of a heavyweight, made rings around the vastly superior Russian forces in the Polish "panhandle" and later, reinforced by troops from the western front, pushed them almost to the gates of Warsaw.

Then winter came, and the front froze.

During 1914 the German armies in the east had fought under a serious handicap. General von Falkenhayn, the Chief of the German General Staff, had thrown the weight of his forces westward, for he considered the eastern front to be, for the time being, only a side show. As a result, the great triumvirate of Hinden-

burg, Ludendorff, and Hoffmann, who wished to achieve a decision in the east while fighting the war defensively in the west, had not enough troops for large-scale operations. Even so, they had worked miracles with their few divisions.

THE ADVANCE

1914 had brought no decision in the west, and the Kaiser was willing to try the eastern alternative. In January 1915 he decided to send the newly formed Tenth Army to the east instead of to the west. One more army, the Eleventh, was composed of troops withdrawn from the west and put under Mackensen.

With these forces, 1915 became the year of the greatest victories in the east for the Central Powers. In February the Germans won the winter battle in Masuria, and on May 2 the real show began, the largest offensive of the entire war. It started with the brilliant breakthrough of Mackensen's Eleventh Army between Tarnow and Gorlice, the southwestern corner of the Russian salient. The breakthrough was so complete that the armies of the Tsar were quickly swept from Galicia and Poland. The Russian soldiers fought bravely and with their customary endurance; but their leadership was not in the same class with the Germans. Most of all the Russians suffered from the lack of armaments and ammunition and from the inefficiency of their transportation system. Huge areas, including Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk, were lost. "The whole strategic apparatus of the Russian defenses, fortresses, railways and river lines had passed into German hands," was how Winston Churchill summarized the results of the summer of 1915 (*The World Crisis*, Vol. VI, p. 325).

When the front froze for the second time, it followed the Duena River to Duenaburg and thence ran due south to the northern tip of Rumania. 1915 had cost the Russians one million in killed and wounded and three quarters of a million in prisoners. The Tsar took over personal command, with General Alexeyev as the actual head of the staff.

But General Falkenhayn had never had his heart in the eastern operations. In 1916 he returned to the west. The wavering and confused attitude of the German military leadership was a bad handicap in the conduct of the war. In contrast to today, the German leaders of the Great War lacked the complete realization of what it was about and consequently lacked a truly great plan for victory. They did not lead a "total war." Falkenhayn now transferred half a million men from Russia to the French war theater, and on February 21 he started his famous attack on Verdun. Then the Austrians, who were supposed to remain on the eastern front in full strength, threw large forces against Italy in the Trentino offensive starting on May 15.

Ever since their disastrous retreats of 1915, the Russian armies had been preparing for a great offensive which was to start at the end of June 1916. The Allies sent armaments in large quantities and huge Russian armies were trained. By the spring of 1916, according to German sources, 140 Russian divisions faced 86 German and Austro-Hungarian divisions.

A STUPENDOUS PLAN

The idea of General Alexeyev for this, the largest offensive ever planned by the Tsarist armies, was based on the fact that the Russians were numerically superior at any given point. He decided to attack all along the front so as not to give the Central Powers a chance to concentrate their forces at any specially threatened point. As soon as heavy fighting had broken out along the entire front and the Germans were unable to move their forces from one part to the other, the Russian reserves were to be thrown in at several places at the same time, particularly in the area of Krevo, to break up the German front once and for all.

This stupendous plan, worthy of an army which called itself a "steam roller," was never fully carried out. The moves of the German and Austrian armies on

other theaters of war precipitated events and upset the time schedule. Again, as in August 1914, urgent appeals began to pour into the Russian headquarters. France was terribly pressed at Verdun and Italy in the Trentino. The Allies, to be sure, did not ask for a premature starting of the general Russian offensive, but they begged that something be done. A stream of visitors from Allied countries proceeded to Russia to plead for aid. The official *History of the USSR*, published in Moscow in 1941, aptly summarizes the events in the spring of 1916:

All this time the Allies demanded of Russia more and still more cannon fodder. In April 1916 French "socialists" were sent to Russia who even suggested the transfer of 400,000 Russian soldiers to France. (Vol. III, p.117.)

The task of relieving the Allies was given to General Brussilov. He was by now in charge of one third of the Russian front, known as the southwestern front, which extended southward from the Pripet Marshes. After four days of tremendous artillery preparation he gave the signal on June 4 for the offensive which carries his name.

THE BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE OF 1916

At first the Brussilov offensive met with extraordinary success. With the exception of one German division in General Bothmer's army, Brussilov faced only divisions of the Austro-Hungarian armies. Though they included many fine regiments, they had also a large percentage of soldiers who were of neither Austrian nor Hungarian origin and who felt no love for the Hapsburg regime.

On a front of more than 300 kilometers the lines collapsed under the impact of Brussilov's armies. Only the center, composed of Bothmer's and the Second Hungarian Army, held out like a rock. The Russian High Command jubilantly decided to exploit the unexpected situation. It sent everything that the railways could carry from other parts of the front. Their numerical superiority was so great that their attacks set in all along the front. But the center of gravity was the southwestern front. In the end, even Bothmer, employing

elastic defense tactics, decided to yield some ground.

Within one month Brussilov captured huge booty and many prisoners. The situation became extremely serious for the Central Powers. Troops were scraped together from everywhere and thrown against the victorious Russians. The attacks on Verdun and in the Trentino were discontinued.

In his book *My War Memories 1914/1918* General Ludendorff fully admits the gravity of the situation brought about by Brussilov's offensive. He writes:

We weakened our lines [in the north] to the utmost in order to assist the armies further to the south. . . . Our confidence that our troops would hold their positions, even if they had only a few men to do it, was unlimited. Our tension grew with the progress of events. . . . By the beginning of July a tremendous struggle was going on along the major part of the eastern front. . . . These were uncommonly serious days. . . . The German troops were exhausted by the continuous battles and had to protect extended fronts; the Austro-Hungarian troops had lost all confidence in their own strength and needed German support everywhere. . . . The Russians were preparing for another gigantic blow, while we continued to shed our blood at the Somme and the Austro-Hungarian Army was under strong pressure at the Italian front. The atmosphere was filled with the forebodings of a storm, our nerves were strained to the utmost. (pp.176-178.)

But by the middle of July, superior leadership, better lines of communications, more efficient training of the individual soldier, and stronger equipment, enabled the Germans to close the dangerous gap. The Brussilov offensive continued to the end of August, but it had definitely been stemmed.

Falkenhayn's authority did not survive Brussilov's blow. On August 28, Hindenburg and Ludendorff were summoned by the Kaiser to replace Falkenhayn. Prince Leopold of Bavaria took Hindenburg's place as commander in chief of the eastern front and General Hoffmann took Ludendorff's as the chief of staff and master mind of the prince.

CHURCHILL'S VERDICT

What was the result of the tremendous efforts of Brussilov's 1916 offensive? We shall let Brussilov's allies answer this question.

Winston Churchill, who is again pushing Russian soldiers into their graves for the sake of the British Empire, has this to say in his evaluation of the Brussilov offensive :

As the Germans gradually arrived upon the broken front, the Russian attacks became increasingly costly and barren. Nevertheless, they were continued with the ruthless prodigality of new hope . . . The Russian generals strove to make flesh and blood achieve the purposes of artillery. Wire entanglements, which there were no shells to cut, were traversed upon the heaps of dead which the German machine-guns piled upon them. This profusion in the commanders was equalled by the devotion of their troops . . . The waste of human life in these unnoticed fields was scarcely exceeded in any period of the war . . . This was the last effective military operation undertaken by the armies of the Czar. (*The World Crisis*, Vol. IV, pp.342-343.)

Liddell Hart, who today is considered Britain's ablest military writer, called the Brussilov offensive "the last vital effort of the Russian army . . . which completed the virtual ruin of Russian military power." (*The Real War*, pp.220-221.)

THE END OF THE TSARS

The Swiss historian Hermann Stegmann, in his monumental *History of the Great War* (Vol.IV, p.364), writes: "Out of the blood which Brussilov had wasted in the summer of 1916 germinated the seed of the revolution." He estimates the total losses of Brussilov's three-months' offensive at 1,797,500 soldiers and 85,980 officers.

These statements were, of course, all made retrospectively. When the eastern front froze for the third time in the late autumn of 1916, Russia outwardly seemed better off than the year before. She had had remarkable success and had, temporarily, gravely endangered the front of the Central Powers. The world was so impressed by the display of Russian might that Rumania finally took the long-postponed step and, on August 27, 1916, declared war on Austria-Hungary.

But beneath the surface things looked different. The Russian people were tired of war, of sacrifices, of inefficiency and corruption. After their blind confidence in the Tsar had been shaken by the terrible and vain losses of two years of

fighting, they wanted their voice to be heard. But, instead, the government became more, rather than less, autocratic. The Duma, the Russian Parliament, was adjourned three times during the winter of 1916/17 in order to silence its voice of criticism. When on March 11 it was even dissolved, the storm broke. On March 15 the Tsar abdicated.

The provisional democratic government which now took over was determined to continue the war at the side of its democratic western allies. Alexander Kerensky, Minister of War, became the chief exponent of this policy. At the same time the Allies, panicky with fear over the possible loss of the Russian cannon fodder, did their utmost to keep Russia in the war. For months Kerensky toured the Army and used his remarkable oratorical talent to rouse its will for continuing the war. Subordinating everything to this one aim, he unscrupulously employed revolutionary phraseology and thereby helped to pave the way for Bolshevism.

THE BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE OF 1917

With a strange combination of revolutionary enthusiasm and Russian nationalism, the Russian Army made one more supreme effort. Again this is linked with the name of Brussilov, who was made commander in chief of all the Russian armies. A narrow stretch, fifty kilometers wide, near the small town of Brzezany, in front of the position captured by the Brussilov offensive of 1916, was decided upon as the place for the break-through. All the firing power the Russian Army could muster was assembled. The guns stood wheel to wheel. Although the Central Powers knew of these preparations, they had only very weak forces at their disposal there, since terrible battles were raging on the western front. But Bothmer was again at his post.

Once again the offensive began with artillery preparation lasting several days. The Russian infantry attacked on July 1. With five- and tenfold superiority, advancing in dense masses, driven by Kerensky

and Brussilov (who were both on the spot), the Russians ran into the German and Austro-Hungarian defenses. Again Bothmer stood like a rock. The Russians made very small gains, for which they paid a terrible price. Then they bogged down.

On July 8 a second Russian attempt was made near Halicz, further to the south. This time the success was greater.

The weak Austrian forces were overcome, and wild enthusiasm swept through Russia. But this was premature. General Bothmer sent his last reserves and, when the Russians tried to exploit their break, they met with German troops who stood like granite. Again the attack got stuck. The two Brussilov offensives of 1916 and 1917, and, we might add here, of the winter 1942/43, have shown that the Russian Army is capable of very powerful



offensives if its leaders are willing to pay the price. But are the results worth the price? We cannot see into the future, but as far as the Great War is concerned this is the verdict of history: the demoralization which the Russian Army suffered in the two Brussilov offensives through its enormous losses and the disappointment after its high-strung hopes was the direct cause of Russia's collapse. After the first Brussilov offensive the Tsarist regime broke down; after the second came the Bolshevik Revolution.

Just as the Russian soldiers were beginning to realize their losses and to recover from the intoxication of Kerensky's oratory, the Germans, on July 19, opened their counteroffensive at Zborov. From that moment on, the initiative in the east was again with the Germans, and it did not leave them till the end of the war. Within an hour the Russian troops were in flight. The entire southern front started to fall back. Within a fortnight all the gains of Brussilov's offensive of 1916 were lost. By August 1, the Russian troops had been pushed out of Galicia. Exactly three years to the day after the start of the war, the might of the Russian Army was definitely broken.

On the same day, Kerensky dismissed Brussilov. His successor, at the head of a counterrevolutionary army, marched on Petrograd. This attempt failed, and he in turn was replaced by Dukhonin. Chaos reigned. The Russian people were not going to stand for it much longer. The stage was set for the Bolsheviks.

VOTING WITH LEGS

"The Army voted for peace with its legs," Lenin remarked cynically when in the autumn of 1917 the Russian Army disintegrated and went home, worn out after three years of terrible losses in men, material, and morale.

The army and the people of Russia wanted peace. The fact that the provisional republican government, which had taken over after the abdication of the Tsar, showed its determination to continue the war, contributed more than

anything else to the victory of the Bolsheviks on November 7, 1917. At that time, about a million and a half "leg-voters"—deserters—were roaming the country, and about ten million Russian soldiers were dead, wounded, or captured.

These figures have since been dwarfed by the unparalleled losses of the Red Army, which in the present war has lost about twice that number in half the time. Nevertheless, the Tsarist Army, which was neither held together by the iron terror of Stalin nor supported by the huge industry built up in the nineteen-thirties, was finished.

With peace slogans as their most effective bait, the Bolsheviks had come into power in Petrograd and a few other centers. If they wanted to stay and eventually to dominate the whole country, they had to fulfill their promise. Nor had they any interest in continuing the war. More realistic than the preceding governments, they had clearly recognized that the Russian nation in its war against Germany was bleeding not for itself but for its Allies. Not that the Bolsheviks were in principle against war. They had maintained all along that their goal, the world revolution, would grow out of wars. But once they had seized power in Russia, they had one chief interest: to strengthen their position and gradually to make it into the cornerstone of the world revolution. For this they needed peace as a breathing spell. Hence it was one of their very first acts when on November 8 the newly formed Soviet Government, called the Council of People's Commissars, (which included Lenin as President, Trotsky as Commissar of Foreign Affairs, and Stalin as Commissar for National Minorities) issued a decree offering peace:

The Workers' and Peasants' Government proposes to all belligerent nations and their governments to commence immediately negotiations for an equitable and democratic peace. An equitable and democratic peace is an immediate peace without annexation, that is, without the seizure of foreign lands, without the forcible annexation of foreign nationalities, and without the payment of indemnities.

THE ALLIES' REACTION

For the moment this was no more than a rhetorical phrase which was lost

in the excitement of the first news about the Revolution and which received no answer. However, the matter was taken up again, and this time more definitely, by Trotsky on November 21 when he addressed his first formal note to the diplomatic representatives of the Allied nations in Petrograd. After informing the ambassadors of the formation of the Soviet Government, he called their attention to the above-mentioned decree of November 8 and added :

I have the honor to request you to consider this document as a formal proposal for an immediate armistice on all fronts and the immediate opening of peace negotiations, with which proposal the plenipotentiary Government of the Russian Republic appeals simultaneously to all the warring peoples and their governments.

At the same time General Dukhonin was ordered to conclude an armistice. The telephone conversation between General Dukhonin at the Russian Headquarters at the front and Lenin, Stalin, and Krylenko in Petrograd took place in the small hours of November 22 and lasted for two and a half hours. When the General refused to comply, he was told that he was discharged. Krylenko took his place, and Dukhonin was later murdered.

The possibility of the Russians concluding peace with the Central Powers was a terrible shock to the Allies. Then, as today, they wanted at all costs to keep Russia in the war. They had not hesitated to sacrifice the Tsar when he had proved too weak to continue the war. They had supported the republican government. Now the Bolsheviks were spoiling everything. Winston Churchill, then Secretary for Munitions, summarizes the desperate situation of the Allies at that time: "Russia down, Italy gasping, France exhausted, the British Army bled white, the U-boats not yet defeated, and the United States three thousand miles away." (*The World Crisis*, Vol. II, p.404.)

The Allies immediately turned on all available pressure to force Russia to continue the war. Shipments of supplies to Russia, contracted for by the Russian Ambassador in the USA, were stopped. The United States even went so far as

to interfere in internal Russian affairs when the American Ambassador, David R. Francis, printed and distributed thousands of copies of a statement in which he tried to incite the Russians to further war efforts. The Russians and the Bolsheviks were constantly reminded by the Allied representatives that in the Pact of London of September 5, 1914, they had promised to fight side by side with the Allies till final victory.

TROTSKY'S DIALECTICS

But trust the Bolsheviks to find a "dialectical" way out. Trotsky innocently declared that all his government desired was a general peace. That is why he had invited the Allies to peace talks in the decree of November 8 and the note of November 21. If the Allies did not even bother to answer these appeals, it was just too bad for them.

Whether the Bolsheviks really wanted a general peace or not is hard to tell. On the one hand, they had a chance of strengthening their bargaining position at the peace conference if negotiations were carried on between all the belligerents, including the Allies. On the other hand, it was in the interest of the world revolution that the war continue beyond the frontiers of Russia until the rest of the world was equally ripe for the revolution. We are inclined to think that Trotsky's insistence on general peace negotiations came more from a desire on the part of the Bolsheviks to establish an alibi for their breach of the London Pact than from a desire to restore peace.

Meanwhile, Trotsky had begun to publish the secret treaties among the Allies in order to win over public opinion in the Allied countries for the Russian peace drive by exposing the "war for democracy" and the treaties in all the nakedness of their greedy and imperialistic character.

The reaction of the Central Powers to the Bolsheviks' suggestion for peace was very different from that of the Allies. Both the German Chancellor and the Austrian Prime Minister declared in their respective diets their governments' readi-

ness to hold peace talks along the lines outlined by the Bolsheviks, not only with Russia but with all the Allies. They suggested December 2 as the date for the opening of the negotiations and Brest-Litovsk, the headquarters of the German commander in chief on the eastern front, as the place.

This was one of the most fateful moments during the Great War. The destiny of the world hung in the balance. Had the Allies accepted, the world might have had peace a year earlier and probably a much better peace than it was to receive at Versailles. In 1917 it would still have been a negotiated peace, not one dictated, as in 1919, by shortsighted hatred and desire for revenge.

"LITHUANIAN BREST"

Where one of the railway lines between Berlin and Moscow crosses the River Bug, lay Brest, one of the Tsar's main fortresses. It was an old commercial center, known in the chronicles of Eastern Europe since the eleventh century. In the fourteenth century it came under the then powerful state of Lithuania and became one of its leading cities. Later it became part of Poland, and finally of Russia. But, in order to distinguish it from other towns of the same name, it kept the name of Brest-Litovsk, that is "Lithuanian Brest."

Here, on December 2, 1917, in the afternoon (the Russians, of course, arrived three and a half hours late at the point where they were to cross the front) the first meeting was opened. Both sides agreed that, with no answer received from the Allies, the negotiations should be carried on between the Central Powers and Russia alone. The Bolsheviks then asked for a truce, not yet an armistice. (The negotiations at Brest were to pass through three stages—truce, armistice, and peace.) The truce was agreed upon on December 5 and was to last till December 17. It was a generous truce, considering the state of affairs in Russia: the Russian troops kept their arms; both sides remained where they were standing; and the Germans even agreed not to

move any army units larger than a division. The delegates were to meet again on December 12.

The stage was now set for one more of Trotsky's appeals to the Allies. He informed the Allies that the negotiations at Brest had been suspended at the initiative of the Russian delegation in order to give the Allies a chance to participate and he asked them:

to express their readiness or refusal to participate in the negotiations for an armistice and peace, and in case of a refusal openly to state before the world, clearly, definitely, and correctly, in the name of what purpose the people of Europe must shed their blood during the fourth year of the war.

Again there was no answer.

THE ARMISTICE

The negotiations in Brest were resumed on December 13. They moved quickly. An armistice was agreed upon. It was to last, not six months as the Bolsheviks had asked, but from noon, December 17, to January 14 and then continue automatically unless one week's notice were given by either side. Meanwhile, both sides were to negotiate with a view to the establishment of peace. The Russians, still anxious not to increase the tension with the Allies more than was absolutely necessary, asked the Germans not to move their troops from the eastern to the western front, and the Germans agreed to this for the duration of the armistice. The exchange of civilian and military prisoners was also provided for.

One week later, on December 22 at 4.24 p.m., the peace conference proper began.

THE SITUATION

The Reds were in a desperate position. The Russian Army had ceased to function. The "Red Army" or, as it was then called, the "Red Guard," which was to play its role later in the civil war and against Allied intervention, had not yet been built up. Thus there was nothing to prevent a further German advance. Moreover, civil war had started within Russia. In the south the antirevolutionary forces were rallying around some Tsarist generals. It was obvious that

Russia needed peace at any price. The only question was: what price would the Central Powers ask?

The Central Powers, Germany in particular, had two chief considerations in mind. The first was that for three and a half years they had been fighting a huge war in order to achieve a real peace. As Russia's allies had ignored the peace conference and fighting continued all over Western and Southern Europe, the Central Powers were forced to consider the treaty terms not only from the point of view of peace with Russia but also from the point of view of continuing the war against Russia's allies. Germany was fully aware of the fact that these allies were doing their utmost to sabotage the establishment of peace in Eastern Europe. It was even possible that the Allies would succeed in overthrowing the Bolshevik Government, and that the next Russian government would renounce the peace treaty and resume the war.

The second fact which the Central Powers had to take into consideration was that in Brest they were not dealing with a national Russian government or even with Russian revolutionaries, but rather with an international gang, the majority of whom were Jews and who admittedly used Russia only as the jumping-off place for the world revolution, with the Central Powers next on their list. Unlike today, Germany was at that time already experiencing internal difficulties owing to her confused domestic policy, not to mention Austria, which was undergoing a considerable crisis. There was, in fact, unrest in all countries involved in the war. To keep Bolshevism as far away from Europe as possible was the duty of every European statesman and soldier, and lay in the interest not only of the Central Powers but certainly of Europe as a whole. To evacuate the occupied territories meant to abandon them to Bolshevization and civil war. (That is exactly what happened a year later when the Central Powers collapsed and their armies returned home. The time was even to

come, in the spring of 1919, when the Allies themselves had to commission German troops under General von der Goltz to aid the Latvians against the Reds!)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The men representing the two sides were as different as the ideas for which they stood.

On the side of the Central Powers were men of ancient, noble lineage, loyal and disciplined servants of their crowned lords, patriotic representatives of their nations.

The Bolsheviks were professional revolutionaries with long criminal records, jailbirds who had fought a lifetime for the overthrow of any existing order. They had been tossed up by the wave of the Revolution, many of them soon to be swallowed up by the next wave. Representing a nation which, to most of them, was foreign from a racial point of view, they had no interest in Russia except as a tool toward world revolution.

The men who were to represent the Central Powers in the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk were: Richard von Kühlmann, Secretary of State of the German Empire and head of the German delegation at Brest, an experienced career diplomat who had been Ambassador to Constantinople in 1916; Count Ottocar Czernin, the cultured Austrian Foreign Minister; Talaat Pasha, the Grand Vizier of the Sultan; and Mr. Popov, the Bulgarian Minister of Justice.

However, the delegation of the Central Powers was dominated by the powerful personality of Major General Max Hoffmann, Prince Leopold's chief of staff, whom the Prince had entrusted to act on his behalf. As the commander of the fortress which he had rebuilt from the ruins of 1915, he was the host of all the delegations (a grand total of more than 400 persons!). One of the ablest German generals, he had a head that reminded his contemporaries of Bismarck's. Moreover, he was a specialist on Russian affairs. He had been an observer on the

Russian front during the Russo-Japanese War, he was familiar with the Russian language, and the destruction of the two Russian armies in East Prussia in 1914 was based partly on his knowledge of the fact that their two commanders were personal enemies.

General Hoffmann was a realist. When, following the first Bolshevik peace offer, Ludendorff had skeptically asked him over the telephone: "Can we negotiate with such people?" Hoffmann had answered without hesitation: "Yes, we can negotiate. Your Excellency needs the troops. And the Bolsheviks are the first to ask for peace."

The chairman of the Bolshevik delegation was Adolf Joffe (Jewish), with Leo Karakhan (Armenian) as secretary. Among the other members, Leo Kamenev-Rosenfeld (Jewish, Trotsky's brother-in-law), Gregory Sokolnikov-Brilliant (Jewish), and Karl Radek-Sobelsohn (Jewish), stood out. For "show," the delegation also included a worker, a peasant, a sailor, and a woman, Madame Bitsenko, who had been in Siberia for murder. The dominating figure on the Soviet side was Leo Trotsky-Bronstein (Jewish), the Foreign Commissar, although he was only present during part of the negotiations. Incidentally, all these Bolshevik luminaries, with the exception of Joffe, who seems to have died a natural death, have since become the victims of Stalin's megalomania. Trotsky was murdered in his Mexico refuge by one of Moscow's agents; the others, including the ex-commander in chief, Krylenko, were all involved in the famous Moscow trials of 1936 to 1938.

The Bolsheviks, being professional revolutionaries who knew nothing of military affairs, had brought with them some Tsarist officers as experts. One of them shot himself the first evening after he had observed the depressing contrast between the delegates who represented his Russia and those of the Central Powers.

Even though the delegates of the Central Powers may not have been aware of it, they were facing unscrupulous

criminals whose one aim was to destroy them and everything that they held dear in European civilization.

There was one more difference between the two delegations. The Reds were interested in dragging out the negotiations as long as possible (on condition that fighting did not resume), hoping that the Revolution might meanwhile spread to the rest of the world. The Central Powers, however, wanted to come to terms as quickly as possible in order to turn all their strength against their enemies in the west.

THE FOURTEEN POINTS

At the start of the peace talks on December 22, the victorious Central Powers agreed to the Bolsheviks' suggestion to carry out the negotiations in public (in glaring contrast to the secret procedure at Versailles). The preliminaries were quickly settled. On December 28 the negotiations reached the territorial question. General Hoffmann told the Bolsheviks that they should not expect to get any of the territories lost in the war.

Now the Allied representatives in Petrograd saw their last chance for bringing the Reds back into the war. The delegate of the American Committee of Public Information wired to America on January 3, suggesting that President Woodrow Wilson make an anti-imperialistic speech in favor of democratic peace in order to reassure the Russians and perhaps to sow discord in the camp of the Central Powers. The result of this suggestion was the notorious Fourteen Points which Wilson incorporated in his speech of January 8. Thus the Fourteen Points, which were later to have such a fatal influence on the trusting German nation, were originally a clever ruse intended for the Russians.

THE EASTERN EUROPEAN BELT

When the negotiations were resumed on January 9, Trotsky appeared as head of the Bolshevik delegation. His provocative impertinence was even harder to bear by the gentlemen of the Central Powers than the oily insincerity of

Joffe. From now on, the fight centered around the fate of the Eastern European belt, that is, the western border areas of the former Tsarist empire.

The Eastern European belt, a large part of which had been conquered by the German armies, is not Russian in the true sense of the word. Finland had been incorporated into the empire of the Tsars in 1809, Estonia and half of Latvia (known as Livonia) in 1721, Lithuania and the other half of Latvia (called Courland) in 1795, White Ruthenia, Poland, and the Ukraine west of the Dniepr in the years 1772 to 1795. The Finns, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians are not even Slavs. The Poles, although Slavs, are bitter enemies of the Russians and have fought in many violent revolts against their subjection by Russia. The White Ruthenians and the Ukrainians are ethnologically close to the Russians, but both, particularly the Ukrainians, possess a long tradition of struggle for independence from Moscow.

At the time when the negotiations began at Brest, the German troops held a line slightly to the east of the winter line of 1915/16. Thus, properly speaking, they stood nowhere on Russian soil. In their demand that the Bolsheviks give up claim to the occupied areas, the Germans declared that they did not intend to annex these areas and, furthermore, that the peoples of the border areas had unequivocally expressed their will to secede. The Germans could point to the following proofs.

THE WILL TO SECEDE

Finland, Estonia, and Latvia had proclaimed their complete independence from Russia on July 20, September 21, and November 28, 1917, respectively. Lithuania had, on September 23, established a National Council with her formal declaration of independence soon to follow. In Poland, Germany and Austria had proclaimed an independent Polish kingdom on November 5, 1916; and a Polish Council of State, of which Pilsudski was a member, had adopted a new Polish constitution. And the Ukraine, after the

fall of the Tsarist Government in the spring of 1917, had formed her own government, the "Rada." In July she obtained autonomy from the Russian Provisional Government, and after the Bolshevik Revolution the Ukrainian Democratic Republic was proclaimed in Kiev. Incidentally, the Bolsheviks themselves had granted the peoples of Russia the right to secede (although they opposed its practical application in every case).

HISTORICAL LOGIC

The Bolsheviks, of course, declared that, in seceding from Russia, the governments of the border areas were acting only under pressure of the Central Powers. That this was not true can be clearly proved today :

First, neither in Finland nor Estonia nor the Ukraine were there any soldiers of the Central Powers when these countries declared their independence from Russia. Secondly, the border countries remained independent even after the collapse of the Central Powers. The sole exception was the Ukraine, where the Bolsheviks, after a bitter civil war, succeeded in restoring their power by force.

No, the secession of the border areas from Russia was not a German trick but a spontaneous act on the part of their peoples and also an act of historical logic. The old Russian Empire had been held together, not by ethnographic bonds, but by the fact that all its parts had the same ruler, the "White Tsar." When the Revolution destroyed the monarchy and its army, the centrifugal forces within the empire came to the fore. Even the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* wrote :

That which the Russian Government is now giving up has not been taken from it by the Central Powers; it has detached itself in the course of a process which would probably have been set in motion by the same Revolution, even without this war. A Russia that has renounced the imperialism of the Tsarist empire need not regard the secession of her outer areas as a mutilation.

The Bolsheviks' loud insistence on self-determination sounded particularly grotesque in view of their own record: they had unleashed a regime of bloody terror in Finland, Estonia, and Livonia; they

had overthrown by force of arms the government which the White Ruthenians had established in Minsk; they had invaded the Ukraine after acknowledging her independence, and they had chased the Constituent Assembly, elected after their revolution, out of Petrograd because it was not in their favor.

The German contention that the border areas wished of their own accord to be free from Bolshevik rule was greatly strengthened when a delegation from the Ukrainian Rada arrived in Brest. The Bolsheviks were, of course, highly displeased, but the Ukrainians answered: It was you Bolsheviks who appealed to all belligerent nations to participate in this conference, and here we are, though a little late.

Trotsky was caught and saw himself forced on January 9 to recognize the delegation's authority to speak in the name of an independent Ukraine. From now on the negotiations with the Ukrainians and the Bolsheviks proceeded side by side. This fact provided the German diplomats with a valuable talking point against the Reds.

TROTSKY'S THEATRICAL COUP . . .

The negotiations between the Central Powers and the Ukraine were a heavy blow to the Bolsheviks. Trotsky hurried to Petrograd. Before a meeting of the Central Committee of the Party he pleaded for the negotiations to be dragged out without concluding peace, hoping that something might happen to better the situation. Lenin, who was more realistic, advocated early peace. The Bolsheviks, he argued, needed peace as a breathing spell in order to strengthen their position in Russia. He reiterated an idea expressed in the official Soviet daily, *Izvestiya*, on November 25: "There is no peace at the expense of Russia that would be worse than a war at the expense of Russia." But for the time being Trotsky won; to the disadvantage, as it later turned out, of the Bolsheviks.

With Trotsky back in Brest, negotiations were resumed on January 30. But

while Trotsky was proud of his success in protracting the negotiations, the Central Powers used the time well and, on February 9, signed a peace treaty with the Ukraine, the first peace treaty of the Great War. They recognized the Ukrainian Republic and delimited its western frontier. Brest-Litovsk itself came within its borders.

Trotsky now realized that his tactics were getting him nowhere. He also saw that there was no chance of obtaining the border areas. He decided to stage a theatrical coup. On February 10, Karakhan telephoned to Petrograd. Stalin was on the wire. Karakhan told him of Trotsky's plan. Stalin gave his O.K.

In the session of that day, Trotsky declared dramatically: "We are out of the war, but we refuse to sign a peace treaty."

Trotsky's "No war—no peace" policy, although sensational, was neither logical nor practical. It was an action typical of Trotsky. It pleased his vanity to have created an uproar in the world. Beyond that it is hard to imagine what benefit Trotsky expected for his side from this coup. Berlin, of course, considered his declaration as notice of the end of the armistice.

. . . AND ITS RESULT

Observing the week's term agreed on in the armistice, the German Army recommenced its advance on February 18 at noon sharp. If perchance Trotsky had hoped that the German troops might refuse to fight, he had badly miscalculated. The German Army rose like one man and its war machine started rolling without a hitch. The Bolsheviks themselves had by now succeeded in completely disorganizing the Russian Army. Without opposition the Germans marched eastward, greeted in Livonia and Estonia as liberators from intolerable Red terror. On February 16, the Ukrainian Rada asked the Central Powers to free the Ukrainian Republic from the Bolshevik invaders—who had captured Kiev after a

merciless bombardment—while at the same time addressing the civilized world by wireless :

To all! Do not believe Bolshevism! Do not believe it! It is nothing but a mask and a hypocritical pretext! Do not look at words, look only at the deeds of the Bolsheviks in our country! In Kiev, Kharkov, Poltava, and other cities of the Ukraine murder and incendiarism are rampant; everybody is being persecuted by the Red Guard, is being chased out of the houses and shot down. Nations of the world, do you know what it means to have a Bolshevik government? Spread this appeal, if you are the friends of true freedom, and send it into all those countries in which the voice of truth and freedom is not being heard.

The news of the German advance caused a panic in Petrograd. The Central Committee met on February 18. At first, Lenin's suggestion to ask the Germans by telegram for peace was narrowly defeated (6:7) by Trotsky's oratory. But when still more alarming news arrived during the day, the Central Committee met once more in the evening. This time Trotsky changed his mind. When the vote was taken, it was 7:6 for immediate peace. Among those who voted in its favor were Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin.

LENIN'S ULTIMATUM

On the following morning the Bolsheviks' readiness to sign peace was broadcast. While the answer from Berlin was still on its way and the German armies were advancing, the Central Committee met again. In the general panic, Trotsky suggested asking the Allies for aid. Lenin, who could not be present at the meeting, sent a slip of paper with a message scribbled on it :

Please add my vote in favor of accepting support and armies from the Anglo-French imperialist bandits. Lenin.

Of course this vote had not the slightest influence on the course of events. Yet Lenin's cynical words reveal his attitude toward the Allies. Stalin has always claimed to be a loyal follower of Lenin. In this point he very likely is.

The terms arrived from Berlin on February 23. In a meeting of the Central Committee, Lenin demanded their acceptance. Enough harm had been done by wasting time in empty talk. The

"policy of revolutionary phrases" had to be dropped, Lenin declared in a moment of outspokenness. Then he offered an ultimatum: Either the Central Committee voted for peace or he would resign. Some of the members spoke vehemently against peace. Finally, a vote was taken on the question: "Shall we accept the German terms immediately?" As the vote was linked with Lenin's ultimatum, its result was a foregone conclusion. There were seven votes in favor, among them Lenin's and Stalin's. There were four "no's," while the remaining four, among them Trotsky, refrained from voting.

THE TREATY

On February 28 the Bolshevik delegation arrived in Brest. Trotsky was not a member. From the Central Powers, too, only second-rank men had come. On March 1 the first meeting was held. The Allies, while talking of aid, gave none. The Treaty was signed on March 3, and the chief provisions were briefly as follows :

Article 1. The war is over. Peace and friendship shall reign between the signatories.

Article 2. Neither side is to conduct any propaganda against the government, the state institutions, or the army of the other party.

Article 3. Russia renounces her sovereignty over the areas west of a certain line (i.e., Poland, Lithuania, Courland). The final frontier line is to be determined by a mixed German-Russian commission. The Bolsheviks are to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of the lost areas. Germany and Austria-Hungary are to determine the future of this territory in agreement with its peoples.

Article 4. Germany is to evacuate the occupied areas after the conclusion of a general peace and the completion of Russian demobilization. The Russians are to evacuate areas occupied in Turkey as well as some districts on the Turkish border.

Article 5. The Russian Army is to be demobilized, the Russian Navy to return to Russian ports. The Baltic and the Black Seas are to be cleared of mines, and trade resumed.

Article 6. Russia acknowledges the peace treaty between the Central Powers and the Ukrainian Republic. She promises also to conclude peace with the Ukraine and to evacuate her territory.

The border toward Estonia and Livonia is fixed. (That toward Estonia corresponded about to the one which later existed in the twenties and thirties, that toward Livonia was more favorable to the Soviets than the one which emerged after Ver-

sailles.) German police are to remain there until the two peoples have organized their own local authorities.

Russia renounces her claims to Finland and the Aaland Islands. (Nothing is said about the future relationship between Russia on the one hand, Finland, Estonia, Livonia, and the Ukraine on the other, in contrast to Poland, Lithuania, and Courland which, according to Article 3, were definitely released from Russian sovereignty.)

Article 7. Both sides acknowledge the independence and territorial integrity of Persia and Afghanistan.

Article 8. Prisoners of war are to be allowed to return to their native countries.

Article 9. No war indemnity is to be paid.

Article 10. Diplomatic and consular relations are to be resumed.

Article 11. Regarding economic relations a special agreement temporarily takes the place of the German-Russian trade treaties of 1894-1904, the final arrangement to be made when normal conditions are restored.

Articles 12 to 14 concern technicalities of the treaty.

In an additional treaty each side agreed to replace damages suffered within its frontiers by the nationals of the other party in violation of international law.

A GERMAN STATEMENT

This was the famous treaty of Brest-Litovsk. It has since been subject to a good deal of denunciation, mostly by people with ulterior motives and by those who have not taken the trouble to read it. We venture to predict that future historians will do more justice to the treaty once it has ceased to be a subject of heated and prejudiced controversy. In view of the nature of Bolshevism as we have come to know it by now, they will certainly not claim that the treaty was too lenient and that Germany should have delivered more people up to the Red terror.

In a memorandum presented to the Reichstag on March 17, 1918, the German Chancellor said about this treaty:

It is a peace without annexation; the territories which Russia releases from her sovereignty will not be placed under the sovereignty of her former opponents; instead, their future form of government is to be decided in agreement with the peoples. It is a peace without contributions; even the new great sacrifices forced upon Germany and her allies by the senseless resistance by those in power in Russia [i.e., after Trotsky's coup], have not led to

a war indemnity being imposed upon the Russian people. The accessory treaties of an economic and legal-political nature are founded on equality and reciprocity; they contain nothing but an execution of what was prepared and brought nearly to the point of agreement in the second stage of the negotiations [i.e., between December 22 and February 10].

Moreover, the fact that the German ultimatum gave the Russian delegation only three days in which to conclude the negotiations does not represent coercion: with the exception of a few of the points of the ultimatum, for the settlement of which this term was more than enough, all points contained in the drafts presented by the Central Powers had been thoroughly discussed in weeks of parleys with the Russian delegates. The results of the discussions, assembled by the German Government, had been in the hands of the Russian Government since the end of January. It was now simply a matter of deciding whether to accept them or reject them. In proper recognition of the political situation in which the Russian Government had placed itself, the latter chose to accept.

These words, devoid of any signs of that much trumped-up "German imperialism," show that the German Government earnestly endeavored to lay the foundations for a genuine peace, not realizing that with Bolshevism a genuine peace was out of the question.

CROCODILE TEARS

The Allies in particular shed many a crocodile tear over the injustice which their poor allies, the Bolsheviks, allegedly had to suffer through the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Yet when, after the collapse of Germany, the Allies were in the supreme position of being able to redraw the map of Europe whichever way they liked, they left the main provisions of the treaty unchanged: they returned neither Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, nor Poland to Russia.

With the conclusion of the treaty the Germans stopped their advance into Russia. Only in the Ukraine, whose independence the Bolsheviks themselves had recognized, an army consisting of Ukrainian volunteers, Ukrainian ex-prisoners of war, and Germans, continued to march. Within two months, this army rid the entire Ukraine of the Bolsheviks. The easternmost line reached by the German forces is shown in our map.

The fact that the treaty of March 3 (including as it did the loss of Livonia, Estonia, and Finland) was harder than the peace conditions had been prior to Trotsky's stunt of February 10 was the fault of Trotsky and, to some extent, of Stalin, who gave his assent to it. Lenin had been in favor of signing peace ever since January 22.

The question remains: Was it a wise move on the part of Germany to conclude peace with the Bolsheviks? The leading German participator at Brest-Litovsk, General Hoffmann, became very doubtful about the wisdom of the treaty soon after it had been concluded. He declared that it would have been better to postpone the offensive in the west, to march to Petrograd and Moscow, to end the bloody regime of the Bolsheviks, to help a Russian national government into power, to conclude with this government a more favorable peace than that granted to the Bolsheviks, returning large parts of the areas lost at Brest-Litovsk, and to make this new Russia an ally of Germany. This, he maintained, would have saved Russia untold misery and the death of millions of people, and might have induced the Allies too to come to terms with Germany (*Der Krieg der versäumten Gelegenheiten*, pp. 224-226).

Though these considerations came too late, they reveal, in the light of our present knowledge, a remarkable political foresight. The trouble with the leaders of the Central Powers and of Europe in general in the winter of 1917/18 was that they did not know Bolshevism as the world was to know it during the following years.

THE ALLIES OFFER THEIR HEART

The treaty still needed the ratification of the contracting parties. The Allies, of course, intrigued as best they could against it. They were all for the Russians fighting—they even offered Krylenko 100 rubles for every Russian soldier whom he could persuade to fight—but

they were not in the least willing to do anything themselves.

At the VII Communist Party Congress (March 6-8, 1918) Lenin won after a hard verbal tussle. The vote was 28:9 (one abstention) in favor of ratification. The Congress of the Soviets, the highest state organ of Soviet Russia, convened on March 14-16. While it was in session, President Wilson made a last-minute appeal:

"The whole heart of the people of the United States is with the people of Russia in its attempt to free themselves forever from autocratic government and become masters of their own life." Read today, it sounds almost like an appeal of F. D. Roosevelt's to Moscow or Chungking.

But at that time the Bolsheviks saw through the Allies' game. Trotsky said to Colonel Robins of the American Red Cross Mission, who was serving as a liaison officer between the Bolsheviks and the American Embassy:

"Colonel Robins, your Embassy sends you here with a big bag marked 'American help.' You arrive every day, and you bring the bag into my room, and you set it down beside your chair, and you keep reaching into it as you talk, and it is a powerful bag. But nothing ever comes out."

On the second day of the Congress, Lenin summoned Colonel Robins.

"What have you heard from your government?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Colonel Robins.

"And what have the British heard from London?"

"Nothing."

Now Lenin made his final speech in favor of ratification. His resolution was adopted, 784:261. The ratification documents were exchanged on March 29.

Thus the Russian nation had obtained peace from her foreign war. But this peace meant only the prelude to the worst catastrophe in all its history. The Bolsheviks used the peace with the Central Powers for the complete enslavement of the Russian people.